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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
THURSDAY, MARCH 2, 2006

In Today's Papers

Jafari Visit to Ankara

All Papers: The Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari said before leaving Ankara on Wednesday that if Turkey had not convinced the Sunni groups to participate in elections, violence in Iraq would have risen further. Jafari played down the criticism by President Talabani over the Iraqi PM's call on to Ankara, saying that he had the necessary authority to visit Turkey. Cumhuriyet speculates that the Iraqi Kurds were worried about a possible rapprochement between Turkey and the Iraqi Sunni and Shiite groups. Ankara is seeking an alliance with the Sunnis and Shiites in the face of Kurdish demands related to Kirkuk and a federal structure in Iraq, says the paper. Hurriyet reports that Turkey had suggested Jafari open two new border crossings between the two countries, of which one will lead to the region controlled by Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the other to the Turkmen-dominated areas. The sides have decided to do feasibility research about the new crossings. Hurriyet also reports that on February 16, Foreign Minister Gul had said "behind closed doors" to visiting Czech Foreign Minister Svoboda that the US should not pullout of Iraq. "If the US withdraws from Iraq, Iran will dominate the Middle East region, and no one will be able to prevent the export of the Iranian Islamic revolution to Turkey and other countries," Gul reportedly said. Svoboda has disclosed Gul's concerns on Iran at a conference at Chatham House in London on February 28.

Ambassador Wilson Interview with Milliyet

US Ambassador Ross Wilson said in an exclusive interview with Milliyet Turkey has shown "how to move from autocratic pasts how democracy can function with freedom." Turkey has taken the leadership in the broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENAI) in the region to help other countries understand what has made Turkish democracy a

success, Wilson said. "Its history and predominantly Muslim population gives Turkey a kind of credibility in the region that's different from what we or the others may have," Wilson noted, adding that Turkey's success as a secular democracy showed how democracy and freedom can advance the society's interests in the region. Wilson stated the US is not planning any military action against Iran, but wanted "to build a broad international consensus that Iran's nuclear weapons programs are unacceptable." "We want Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment activities, to resume its cooperation with the IAEA, and to resume negotiations with the so-called EU-Troika. We believe Turkey has delivered that message," Wilson emphasized. The US Ambassador recalled that over the weekend, Iraqi leaders from all of the main groups came together to condemn violence. "They recommitted themselves quickly to form a national unity government. All of Iraq's leaders, including the Kurdish leaders in Iraq, have committed themselves to the Iraqi constitution. We think that Turkey is determined also to support those Iraqi efforts to form a strong, united and democratic government," Wilson said. Wilson stressed that he regarded the fight against the PKK as an integral part of the overall fight against international terrorism. "To be able to deal with the PKK problem, you have to deal with the support that it gets from Europe and other countries. Turkey faces lots of different problems and challenges in meeting the aspirations of the citizens in the southeastern part of the country, including the Kurdish residents," Wilson noted, stressing that the fight against terrorism is separate from further perfecting Turkey's democracy in a way to accommodate the aspirations of all its people.

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Demonstrations against Iraq War

Hurriyet: Celeste Zappala, an American mother who lost her son in Iraq, joined March 1 rally in Istanbul held on the third anniversary of the rejection by the Turkish Parliament of the deployment of US troops in Iraq through Turkish territory. "The majority of people in my country do not support this war and George Bush," Zappala told the rally held by NGOs, labor unions and political parties. In Ankara, a small group protested against the Iraq war in front of the US Embassy in a peaceful demonstration.

Turkey against the NATO Force Expansion to the Black Sea
Yeni Safak, Cumhuriyet, Sabah, Aksam, Star: The US is trying to convince Turkey and Russia to expand NATO's operation Active Endeavour from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Turkish sources say that NATO's Operation Active Endeavour was launched in the Mediterranean in order to fight terrorism. Since three of the Black Sea countries (Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania) are members of NATO, there is no need to form another initiative in the Black Sea.

Commenting on the issue, mass appeal Sabah columnist Erdal Safak advises Ankara to maintain its stance. "The US wants to station a naval force in the Black Sea while Turkey sees it as conflicting with its regional politics as well as a potential threat to its relationship with Russia. By keeping a permanent force in the Black Sea, the US wants to control and support the revolution process in East Europe, the Caucasus and the entire region. The US tries to use NATO as a Trojan Horse for controlling the Black Sea, and Turkey is very right to oppose this initiative" he wrote.

President Bush in Afghanistan

Sabah, Milliyet and others: President Bush paid a surprise visit to Afghanistan on March 1. President Bush visited the US base in Bagram and joined the opening ceremony of the US Embassy in Afghanistan together with the President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai, Mrs. Bush, and Secretary Rice. President Bush traveled to India after Afghanistan was protested by the tens of thousands demonstrators in there. President Bush is expected to travel to Pakistan after India.

Attaching great importance to President's visit to India, Fikret Ertan observed in the Islamist oriented-intellectual Zaman: "Bush's India visit is extremely important as it indicates growing bilateral ties between the US and India, and the nature of ties seems to be going toward a strategic partnership. The US and India have been negotiating for a nuclear cooperation agreement which is expected to be signed during President Bush's trip. President Bush's trip list, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India constitutes a strategic quadrangle and is as important as the Iraq issue in world politics."

The US Narcotic Report

All papers: According to the US annual international drug report Turkey became an important base for the drug trafficking. The report says that tons of heroin are transported through Turkey every month to be delivered mainly to Europe and in limited measures to the US. The report also mentions the increasing money laundering cases in Turkey and suggests that this could be prevented by coordination of police and judiciary work. Meanwhile, Istanbul police seized 42 kilos of cocaine from a ship traveling from Bolivia to Iran yesterday and arrested 9 people in connection with drug trafficking.

Television Highlights

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(NTV, 7:00 AM)

Domestic News

- Protest rallies held in Ankara and Istanbul against Iraq war on the anniversary Turkish parliament's rejection of US troop transfer to Iraq through Turkish land.

- Snubbing the veto of President Sezer, Turkish parliament passed a bill for the establishment of 15 new universities. New universities are to be established in the provinces of Kyrsehir, Kastamonu, Duzce, Burdur, Usak, Rize, Tekirdag, Erzincan, Aksaray, Giresun, Corum, Yozgat, Adiyaman, Ordu and Amasya, requiring 2,000 new academic staff and 15 rectors. Now, President Sezer will either approve it or take it to the Constitutional Court for annulment.

International News

- Hamas leader Ismail Haniya said on the eve of an official visit to Moscow that his party will not change its position regarding Israel.

- A leading Islamic Jihad commander in the Gaza Strip is killed by a bomb that ripped through his car.

- Belgian judicial authorities have confirmed officially that Fehriye Erdal, the extreme leftist militant charged with the killing of the prominent Turkish businessman Ozdemir Sabanci, is missing.

- Several Turkish Cypriots nationals have applied to Greek Cypriot authorities to participate in the May 21 elections.

Economy News

- Japanese credit rating agency JCR said it will review Turkey's foreign currency credit note, which stands at BB-.

- Turkish exports rose by 7.51 percent year-on-year to USD 6.124 billion in February, the Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TIM) said.

WILSON